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ABSTRACT

This paper presents some legal and social policy aspects of military child care facilities in the United States. Under the jurisdiction of Article I of the United States Constitution, the federal government has the right to determine the social welfare rights of people living on military installations; yet these people are not included in programs such as Head Start, Follow Through, and the proposed Family Assistance Plan, even though 20,000 service men have been forced to go on welfare. By military regulations, all day care must be maintained by tuition paid by parents and day care is a relatively expensive service to purchase. Since no federal funds are involved, the Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements do not apply and state requirements do not apply on federal property. Since officers' families dominate military family housing, they have easier access to day care facilities as well as more money to afford the service. Resources to pay staff are toolow to attract or train well-qualified people. Existing military day care, like the grade school system, takes place on the bases, contributing to the isolation of an immense subculture. (Author/AJ)

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MILITARY DAY CARE: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVE

Literally thousands of children from infancy to age fourteen live on military installations with their families. Most of these children could benefit from developmental child care programs, if they were offered. All too often they are not.

Difficulties in securing day care programs for these children stem directly from the United States Constitution, Article 1, which reads: "The Congress shall have the power to excerise exclusive legislation over all places purchased . . . . for the erection of Forts, Magazines, Arsenals, Dockyards and other needful buildings."

This article is commonly referred to as the "Exclusive Jurisdiction Clause." In effect, Congress has the right to excerise exclusive control over all federal properties and all people residing on such property. This jurisdiction has been construed to mean that the federal government can determine, for example, the social welfare rights of individuals in this situation. Yet the government has not seen fit to include the military, as a matter of policy or

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law, into such social welfare programs (in the best sense of the word) as Head Start, Follow-Through, the proposed Family Assistance Plan and so on.

Unique Problems

Military day care, on one hand, presents us with a unique set of problems. First, by military regulations all day care must be "self sustaining." That is, all on-going day care services must be maintained by whatever the parents pay for the program. This practice results in sporadic funding and in an equally sporadic program.

Low military pay scales , consequently, make day care a relatively expensive service to purchase. Moreover, pay is determined largely by rank and not need. This means larger families are less able to afford day care, and sliding pay scales for military day care are the exception rather than the rule.

In addition, there are no federal programs which directly supply funds to the military for day care. The defense budget does not include funding for such services; capital developments for military day care centers usually comes from what is called a "welfare fund." The fund is non-appropriated monies from the profits realized by

military movie theaters, bowling alleys, and golf courses.

Licensing

Since no federal funds are used for military day care, the Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements do not apply. (By law, these regulations apply to all federally subsidized day care projects.) However, a military representative does sit on the Federal Panel on Early Childhood which helps to formulate the requirements. Also, since military day care takes place on federal property - and consequently out of the state's jurisdiction, state day care requirements do not hold. The only licensing requirements , therfore, are those which any installation independently happens to generate.

Even if strict licensing and enforcement were possible, it is doubtful that this would improve military day care because funding is sporadic and in almost all cases insufficent. Sometimes Congressionally appropriated funds can be used to partially sustain day care operations, if the building where day care is provided is called, for example, an "emergency shelter."

Funds then can be expended to improve, equip, and maintain the building for that stated purpose. Such action can improve at least the physical environment where day care takes place. More often, though, when standards are applied they are the standards for military buildings. This results,

for instance, in having panic bars, or windows to high for the children and facilities that simply make the building unsafe for youngsters. Meeting building standards under these type of circumstances creates hazards and inconvtences rather than improving conditions.

Whom Day Care Serves

Military day care with all its drawbacks is also not reaching those who oftentimes need it most. Since officers families dominate military family housing, they have easier access to day care facilities as well as more money to afford the service. This is in contrast to the lower ranking soldier and his family who must frequently live outside a base (because of a lack of military housing) with less funds.

Opting for day care off a base is not always possible. Either the location of the base makes this impractical or the low income which most families receive makes this economically infeasible to purchase day care in the higher priced private market.

In addition, the types of child care on any base are limited to day care centers and babysitters. Family day care as well as other forms of child care are virtually non-existent.

Staff and Program

According to a 1969 study of Army Child Care Centers, the mean salary for workers was $1.60 an hour while the director might recieve anywhere from $1.75 an hour to $550 per month. Generally, these low wages along with a lack of continuing educational programs for the staff do not attract nor train a group of experienced or qualified people.

Staff, besides being underpaid, are overworked. In the same study the average teacher/child ratio was greater than 10 to 1 (or two times more children per adult than is considered advisable for children 3-5). Only about one half of the centers had any planned cognitive development program and when such programs existed parents paid an additional increment.

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All military day care is furnished base and is not coordinated at any level of the armed services. To date only the Navy is considering standardize day care regulations (which do contain a minimal educational component in the programs for the children) which will apply to all Naval installations. The Air Force has widely distributed the day care requirements of its Offut base in Nebraska . The Offut regulations serve only as a guide and are not binding to other bases. A section of the Army regulations,

on the other hand, dealing with children's programs reads:

> Since the prime objective of child care center is day care for a dependent child, a program must be established to <u>occupy a child's time</u> while in the center.

The stress here , as in some of the other branches of the service, is on the custodial nature of the programs.

Day Care and Welfare

Specifically, though, the problems which plague military day care are the problems which plague all the social welfare programs in the miliary. Both are underfunded and both lack coordination. Recently, social welfare in the military has come to the forefront of the publics mind as well as to Congress.

U.S. Senator Mark Hatfield reported that the yearly pay for new enlistees placed "every first-term enlisted man in the poverty class" - some $500 below the government recognized civilian poverty level. He added, 20,000 servicemen were forced to go on welfare to make ends meet. Said Hatfield, " that a man with or without a child has to be put on welfare while serving his country certainly should put the Senate to shame."

It is hoped that in light of these facts and more that

at least by meeting the day care need in the armed services a number of related problems could be eased i.e. that is increasing the families income by having the women assume some working responsibility and at the sametime by providing the child with an educational cirriculum.

Day Care as Military Policy

Military day care takes place in a certain social context. Like the grade school system on military bases, it is separated from the surrounding communities. Both institutions usually provide services for the upper echolons of the military because officers' families dominate base housing.

As such, these programs help insulate and isolate the children from exposure to local communities and ideas. They further remove officers' families as a whole from the mainstream of American social life. In the same fashion, the PX's and Navy Exchanges provide for a similar closed economic system.

Such policy as this tends to create and maintain an independent subculture of immense size. As Cornell psychologist Urie Bronfrebrenner has said many times, we must bring children back into the lives of people in order to make for a health society. Now it appears that we must first reintroduce an entire subculture back into society and then help them to better care for their children.

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